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ABSTRACT

Beginning with the assumption that a curriculum advisory council composed of a broad community and educational representation has been established, this paper concerns the proper roles of citizens and professional educators on this council. It holds that the community-school decision-making body should consider all types of curriculum questions, but final decision-making power should be given to those judged to possess greatest expertise regarding particular questions. The remainder of the paper concerns the description of questions, issues, and sources that bear on curriculum considerations in school-community relations. These are discussed under the headings of philosophy, determining objectives, selecting experiences (content), determining sequence, selecting organizational patterns, evaluation, and relevance. An extensive bibliography, with some brief annotations, is organized under the above topics. (Author/MLF)

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# A CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKING GUIDE FOR ADMINISTRATORS, SCHOOL BOARDS AND CITIZEN COMMITTEES

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

That which happens to children is the ultimate purpose of the schooling enterprise; for what other purpose could schools reasonably be established? If we assume that curriculum entails all of the experiences engaged in by students in school, then we should hold that curriculum decision is the end product of all other types of administrative decisions e.g., financial, plant management; personnel, school-community relations, etc.

Because of the importance of curriculum development and the diversity of administrative decision making requirements, I will attempt to explicate perennial curriculum questions in this paper. Abbot Lawrence Lowell helpfully reminded us that:

> The real art of life consists in finding out what is the question to be solved, and the person who can find out what problem is to be solved is the man who really makes contributions to life.[1]

I am assuming that if the administrator possesses a guide to curriculum questions and sources* of alternative answers, he or she will be better able to direct the course of decisions. It is the competent administrative leader, more than anyone else, who must set the stage for high quality decision-making processes. It is such a leader who can prevent the "rediscovery-of-the-wheel" syndrome, too prevalent a phenomenon among curricular decisions of today.

This is not an admonition for autocratic leadership; on the contrary, it is an admonition for increased strength of participants in participatory

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[1]Wallis, Charles L. (ed). The Teasure Chest, New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

*It is not my intent to provide an exhaustive treatment of positions and sources; rather, it is my intent to provide samples which could initiate systematic inquiry into issues about curriculum building.

democracy. At the possible expense of being too idealistic, let us assume in this paper that an advisory council composed of a broad community and educational representation has been established and is functioning on a more-or-less democratic basis. (The establishment of such a council is difficult and requires substantial study, but is treated elsewhere in the literature, and is beyond the scope of this paper.)

## The Proper Roles of Citizens and Professional Educators

Providing a guide certainly does not mean that all of the important barriers are to be assumed conquered. When any given question is answered the number of remaining questions is not reduced, but increased. Increased knowledge issues forth more, not less, questions. The guide is not a panacea, but a springboard to effective curriculum decision.

One of the fundamental questions raised by curriculum scholars after a particular school-community decision-making council is accepted as adequate is: "What curriculum questions should be determined by community participation, and what questions should be exclusively reserved for the school personnel?" Who should determine the goals, methodology, learning experiences, materials, sequence, organizational patterns, and evaluational processes that comprise the curriculum? Which of these decisions should be primarily community decisions? Which should be reserved for the professionally trained educators in the school system? Think of an analogy in the field of medicine. A member of the community feels ill. He selects a physician who identifies the illness and explains to the best of his knowledge the course which must be taken to alleviate the illness. The patient then accepts or rejects that course of action (i.e., the objective). If the patient accepts, the physician is deemed more competently trained than the patient to make the remainder

of the decisions e.g., operation procedures (methodology), the type of operation to conduct (experiences or content), the equipment to use in performing the operation (materials), when to perform each stage of the operation (sequence), how the operating room and the patient's room should be organized (organizational patterns), and the extent to which various stages of the operation were successful (evaluation). Analogies are never completely effective, e.g., the student is usually not allowed to select the teacher but the patient is allowed to select the physician; nevertheless, the position of scholars who hold that policy should allow the community to accept and reject objectives, but not the means for achieving those objectives, has been depicted.

The curriculum scholar on the other side of the fence might cite a comparable analogy in the realm of politics. He would assert that when a representative is elected to office, it is his obligation to mirror the opinion of his constituency in his voting. Thus, all members of the community have the right to input on all issues; moreover, it is assumed that each person understands the issues as well as the elected representative does if it was initially assumed that knowing the issues is important for making good decisions. The analogy for education is, of course, that community members know their needs sufficiently well to merit more input in educational decision-making than do the professional educators.

Proponents of the medical analogy would be likely to retort that the latter position makes the teacher a mere automaton of the community, and negates professional competency. Another political analogy could, however, be constructed to support the medical analogy, i.e., we elect political representatives (similarly, we select teachers) because we have faith in their knowledge and ability to study the issues and make wise judgments about curriculum and its implementation.

The position of this paper is that both positions have merits, and that neither position should be made an irrevocable policy. Consonance with democratic ideals holds that the community-school decision-making body should consider all types of curriculum questions, but final decision-making power should be given to those judged to possess greatest expertise regarding particular questions. Hence, questions regarding the selection of learning experiences that facilitate objectives would generally be reserved for the professional educators. Not to be neglected is the role of the layman as expert in a given situation. Frequently, a citizen will possess a high degree of expertise in a given curriculum area (whether it be woodworking or astrophysics), and at that point it would be most advantageous to seek the advice in his or her professional, rather than lay, capacity. The ideal decision-making policy should be one which provides for input from an adequate sample of community and school membership (including students), and which provides for decision-making to be reserved for whomever is deemed by the council to be best able to understand an issue at hand.

Some may reject this position, criticizing it as being too ideal. They might well be reminded that unreachable ideals spur continuous growth. If group decision-making is embarked upon with a desire to perform at the highest level of demoncratic decision-making, then a sizable stride has been taken toward the achievement of the ideal. If it is thought impossible from the outset, progress will be interred.

## Curriculum Questions to Ponder

What, then, are the salient questions -- and positions within these questions -- of curriculum development?

1. philosophy (my addition)
2. determining objectives
3. selecting experiences (content)
4. determining sequence
5. selecting organizational patterns

6. evaluation
7. relevance[3]

Although these topics will be discussed separately, it is essential that the reader continuously realize the dynamic interrelatedness of each of the topics with one another. Curriculum development is essentially a process of education, a process of continual reconstruction of current curriculum by projecting the consequences of various courses of action. John Dewey stated the process of education well; inasmuch as curriculum development is education for those involved in the curriculum decision-making processes Dewey's definition of education which follows applies to those so involved:

> ...that reconstruction and reorganization of experience which adds to meaning of experience, and which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experience. (Democracy and Education, pp. 93-94)

Let us now proceed with the description of questions, issues, and sources which bear on curriculum considerations in school-community relations.

1. Philosophy: Statements of "philosophy" found in the policy manuals of school systems are seldom more than two or three prargraph collections of largely indefensible educational jargon which has little bearing on further delineation and/or implementation. Much that is systematic has been written by scholars in the area of educational philosophy. If there is to be an active and productive role for the work of educational philosophy, it is predicted upon the responsibility of school adminstrators and educational philosophers to draw upon the expertise of one another. Since most communities do not possess a resident philosopher of education, it would behoove school-community decision-making bodies to seriously consult such persons and/or their works in order that they might devise a (perhaps eclectic) filtering system to

[3]Considerable credit for this listing is attributed to Professor J. Harlan Shores, University of Illinois.

systematically sort and deal with the preponderant issues, problems, fads, bandwagon trends, materials, and pressures from multifarious sources. A strong philosophical base generates defensible decision. It is in this regard that philosophy and theory can have direct relevance to action.

2. How should objectives be determined? One could elaborate extensively on this consideration. Most curriculum scholars believe that objectives (goals) should be determined through a cooperative venture of professional educators and lay citizens. This, however, is merely a starting point, because there are several types of objectives, which can readily lead to highly divergent levels of decision-making, such as those which follow:

a) Global objectives: i.e., broad general statements e.g., "The Seven Cardinal Principles of Education," various statements of the Educational Policies Commission of the N.E.A., and statements derived from Whitehouse Conferences.

b) Behavioral Objectives: i.e., specific statements stated in terms of observable behavior e.g., Popham, Mager. (for a critique of this form see Arthur Combs).

c) Criterial Objectives: Criteria for objectives are stated (e.g., Smith et. al. and Taba). For example Smith, Stanley, and Shores list the following criteria: social adequacy; basic needs; democratic ideals; consistency and non-contradiction; and behavioristic interpretation. (1957, pp. 107-123). Specific objectives must then meet the test of all five criteria, although the priority may be different according to situations.

d) Evolving objectives: John Dewey, and many of the open-education proponents believe that goals evolve during the act of teaching. Therefore, they cannot be specified at the outset, and are so thoroughly intertwined with method, sequencing, content selection, and evaluation that they cannot be distinguished as separate entities.

It is readily evident that the degree of community participation in the implementation of curriculum would vastly differ relative to the position taken on the question of determination of objectives.

3. How should content and learning experiences be selected? The extent to which the public is involved in this decision is partially determined by a

given school's position on the nature of objectives. Criteria for content selection could be of immense variety, but Smith, Stanley, and Shores (1957, pp. 126-166) provide a helpful summation of criterial considerations in the form of the following questions: Do the experiences contribute to social (democratic) development? Are the subject matter experiences interesting to the learner? Is the subject matter significant to an organized field of knowledge? Is the content useful? Does the subject matter stand the test of survival? Although not exhaustive of possible criteria, the placing of these five in priority order establish a consistent basis for most positions on this question. For example, there is considerable difference between using the classics (test of survival) or childhood activities (interest) as the prime determiner of content and learning experiences.

4. How should the sequence of subject matter be determined? Smith, Stanley, and Shores (1957, pp. 169-195) discuss the following characteristics of learners as central to this consideration: the experiential background, academic aptitude, maturation, interest, usefulness, and difficulty. Today the problem usually is resolved at some point on a continuum between sequencing relative to subject matter and sequencing relative to interest. Should experiences be sequenced according to the structure of the academic discipline (advocates include Bruner, Ford and Pugno)? Should sequence stem from some conception of child interest (e.g., Dewey, Holt, Neill)? Should sequence be determined by the structure of the child's development (Piaget, Kohlberg)?

5. How should classroom organizational patterns be selected? The variety and number of patterns which have been suggested and implemented in some form or another is enormous. The following are but a sample of the many:

a) Nongarded grouping: Students who fall within a certain broad age range are helped to progress through prescribed curriculum to the extent that their capacity allows. Usually a large number of hierarchies are established for teaching children who have progressed to various levels.

b) Multigrade or Multiage grouping: Children of three or more grade levels are grouped together in a self-contained classroom or in other settings. The intent is to provide students with the benefits of a family-type atmosphere which holds potential for peers providing assistance to one another.

c) Team learning: Students of the same or different grade levels are encouraged to pursue tasks as a team, emphasizing cooperation, mutual assistance, and the achievement of consensus.

d) Interest grouping: Grouping is based on student interest by providing options among content for student selection, options among teachers who offer different topics at the same time, or allowing student groups to evolve around different interest areas. The rationale is that students who are interested will find relevance in their learning, and that such relevance might then be geared into other channels which enhance further learning.

e) Trump Plan: This plan establishes a program whereby students are involved in a scheduled large group activity, small group activity, and independent study. Opportunity is thereby provided for several types of learning styles.

f) Self-contained classroom: Students are homogeneously or heterogeneously assigned to a room with one teacher. Teachers are felt to have the advantage of knowing and providing for student needs and interests more fully.

g) Departmentalization: Students move to different teachers for each subject. This approach is believed to provide for greater expertise in the several subject fields.

h) Dual-progress plan: This is an attempt to provide a combination of subject and interest oriented approaches. Academic subjects are pursued during one-half of the day, while interest areas are developed during the second half.

i) Contract grouping: Students are grouped according to the manner in which they choose or accomplish learning tasks which they have agreed to pursue. (This is not to be confused with "performance contracting" i.e., agreements made by business and industry to accomplish certain learning tasks in specified periods of time.)

j) Mini-courses: Part or all of the curriculum is composed of a number of short courses to be pursued. In some cases students are able to select courses from a range of options. The intent is to expose students to a wide range of areas without allowing a topic to go beyond the student's attention span.

k) Student formulated curricula: Students of an entire school, or a smaller group within a school are allowed to devise their own curriculum. The rationale is that considerable learning will accrue from the decision-making processes, as well as from pursuit of the actual studies selected.

1) Grouping among schools: Several school systems have begun to offer alternative schools within their districts. This provides for choice on the part of parents and students relative to particular beliefs, persuasions, and orientations. The possible advent of the voucher system (granting a certificate to parents which represents tax dollars to be spent for the education of their children in any of the alternative educational systems available) could provide for educational diversity of unrealized magnitude.

Should all of the possible plans be discussed by a school community decision-making body, or should some alternatives be intentionally omitted? Should policy state that many alternatives are available for teachers at their discretion? (See Bibliography)

6. How should the curricular program be evaluated? Should evaluation be a summative only, or should it be formative as well (Bloom, et al., 1971)? Should not only the product be evaluated, but also the context, input, and process (Stufflebeam in Beatty, 1969)? Can all aspects of curricular implementation be evaluated? If they cannot, should they be discarded? What aspects might well be attempted by whom? If curriculum is designed to change students in desirable ways, we have the responsibility to determine whether those desirable ways are being obtained by the students.

7. Relevance: The question of relevance is implicit within and among each of the areas already discussed. Relevance might well be considered a check and balance system. As such it accentuates the web-like nature of the whole curriculum development process. One might begin the quest for relevance by seeking the importance that each of the areas of curriculum development has for each of the other areas. The essence of the matter is that all aspects of the curricular program, viewed in its most pervasive perspective, should be generally relevant to each other, and specifically relevant to the social and personal experience of the student. All persons influencing and/or influenced by the curriculum would do well to heed the admonishment of Metcalf and Hunt (in Van Til, 1971, 385-61) and continously ask the following: "What

kind of person am I now? What will I become if present habits and trends persist? What kind of person would I like to become? What can be done now about the tendencies and preferences that conflict?" It is only when all persons who are involved in a process ask (relevant) questions such as these that relevance has full potential to be realized.*

In conclusion, the emphasis on all* persons might be quite idealistic, but belief in a fully-functioning democratic ethic also requires a bit of idealism, perhaps a considerable portion. It requires one to assume with John Stuart Mill (On Liberty) that if the false is given full hearing, the truth will prevail; that challenge keeps established doctrines invigorated; and that competing views hold portions of the truth. Thus, Mill advocated free expression of opinion. If school-community decision-making bodies are to function effectively, we must seriously believe Mill's principles of free expression of opinion, and act on that belief -- not for the purposes of glossed-over public relations, but for the purposes of cooperatively providing better curricula for our children and youth.

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*The reference to "all" certainly does not mean to imply a massive "town meeting" type of deliberation; it implies representation of all positions, a process which can often be improved by a good consultant.

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Many of the sources listed above have dealt with the topic of relevance in a less direct, but not necessarily less helpful manner.